

# Building a City of Learners

The Honorable Nan Whaley

Mayor, City of Dayton



Good morning.

I am so honored to have this opportunity, and I am thrilled and very grateful that all of you are able to join us this morning.

The role I assume today is an incredible responsibility, and I appreciate knowing that there are some really special people that will be there to support me.

I am blessed to have loving, devoted parents who taught me the value of hard work and sacrifice and the importance of giving back to my community.

I am blessed to have a supportive and giving husband who shares my love for Dayton and my passion for public service.

I am blessed to serve with four experienced, dedicated colleagues who are as committed as I am to building a bright future for every resident of Dayton.

I am blessed to work with a talented city manager who is surrounded by bright, skillful professionals who want Dayton to thrive.

I am blessed to have partners across the region who believe in the importance of a strong central city and are tirelessly working to make our community a better place.

And, in a very profound and personal sense, I am blessed to have this chance to serve the people of this, my chosen hometown -- a city with a storied record of innovation and perseverance -- a city with so many valuable assets and resources -- a city capable of embracing change and that stands ready for a bold, new future.

This morning I have taken the oath of office to become the 19<sup>th</sup> mayor to lead this city under its current charter.

As your new mayor, I am inspired by Dayton's history, and I am energized by its can-do spirit.

That spirit has tamed rivers and conquered the skies.

It has given us life-changing breakthroughs and produced sons and daughters who have left prominent marks not just on Dayton but on the entire world.

That determined spirit is what propels this community to tackle every difficulty -- every setback -- every challenge it has ever faced, with tenacity -- with resolve -- and with heart.

Dayton is a city that knows how to soar.

During the past year, as I spoke with residents on their front porches and in their neighborhoods -- in their community centers and their meeting rooms - - in their places of worship and at their job sites -- we talked about all the things that make Dayton special.

We talked about building on our community assets, like our abundant water supply -- a thriving health care industry -- an airport with unmatched convenience and accessibility -- and the commanding presence of Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

We talked about recent signs of progress like the new riverfront developments -- new downtown housing -- and new investments in research and technology.

But, while we have made some significant gains, we know we continue to face some very tough challenges.

The Great Recession rocked our community, and even before the economy crumbled in 2008, many of our neighbors had lost their jobs or were living in fear that they could lose their jobs.

We are going through what is an often brutal economic transformation, and the rules for a lot of people have changed. To get a secure, well-paying job today matters less on who you know, what you can lift or how many shifts you are willing to work.

What counts now is what you know and how willing you are to keep learning new skills.

After decades of economic decline, our recent successes are just the beginning of a long journey.

This journey will not be easy. We will not fix everything that needs to be fixed overnight.

We will have to work long and hard -- we will have to be smart -- and we will have to focus on those changes that will make a real and lasting difference.

When I talk to people about what they want for Dayton, they talk about the importance of safe, attractive neighborhoods.

They want to see their home values go up, not down.

They say they want a busy downtown that is alive with people.

They want to come to concerts and plays and baseball games and festivals.

They want restaurants and entertainment venues to thrive in the city.

But, what people say they want for Dayton above all else are jobs.

They want to see new jobs locate here.

They want to see new jobs created here. And, they don't want to lose the jobs that are already here.

There is one unmistakable, indisputable reality that ties all of these hopes together. There is one key issue that we must address if we are at all serious about building a thriving, more prosperous community.

For the people of Dayton to have access to good jobs -- for people to invest in their homes and their neighborhoods -- and to make our downtown more vibrant -- we must have high-quality schools.

All of our schools -- whether they are public, private or charter schools -- must succeed in preparing our city's children to compete in today's changing job market.

The path to a stronger Dayton leads through the hallways of Dunbar -- Belmont -- Chaminade-Julienne -- Stivers -- and the Pathway School of Discovery.

The very future of our city is being decided today in classrooms at Fairview -- the Dayton Early College Academy -- the Emerson Academy -- Valerie -- Cleveland -- Eastmont -- and Louise Troy.

The students in these classrooms will be our region's future workforce -- our next generation of homeowners.

They are the community leaders and business owners of tomorrow.

But, the fact that almost half of Dayton's third-graders are at risk of not being promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade under Ohio's new 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade reading guarantee is an undeniable wake-up call.

This is a crisis, not just for these children and their families, and not just for Dayton schools. This is a crisis for our entire community.

All of our efforts to create new jobs -- to attract new employers -- to grow an educated workforce -- and to bring new families into our neighborhoods will fall short if we fail to prepare our children to compete in the new global economy.

Nelson Mandela said it best: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Improving our schools will change our city -- our neighborhoods -- and, most important, it will change the world for the children of Dayton.

I hope all of you have heard about Learn to Earn Dayton. This countywide initiative has set an incredibly aggressive goal.

By 2025, we want half of all high school grads to be earning a two or four-year degree.

By then we are told that 2 out of every 3 jobs will require a college degree. For our children to be competitive -- for our children to be ready to fill the jobs of the future -- we have to reach this goal.

All of our county's 16 school superintendents -- the Montgomery County Commission and -- most of all, Dayton Superintendent Lori Ward and the entire Dayton School Board -- all support this effort.

Today I am making a commitment to the parents, students, teachers, administrators and school officials all across this city.

In your quest for excellence, you will have no greater supporter -- no more determined advocate -- and no more steadfast champion than this Mayor of Dayton.

City Hall must focus on ways to contribute to the success of our children with an urgency it has never displayed before. We must provide both leadership and resources to support a new culture – a culture where every child graduates from high school prepared to go to college, join the military or seek advanced training in a marketable job skill.

This must become a major priority for our city, and I know that my colleagues on the city commission support this call to action.

Both Commissioner Williams and Commissioner Mims are former members of the Dayton School Board, and Commissioner Mims is a career educator who most recently served on the state school board.

Commissioner Lovelace is a retired administrator at the University of Dayton.

And, Commissioner Joseph's son Niko just began kindergarten this year.

This commission gets it. We know the value of education, and we know what it means for our city and our region's future.

One year ago after taking his oath of office, the newly elected mayor of Portland, Oregon, declared, "Portland cannot claim to be a great city unless all of our schools are great schools, and unless all of our children are set up to succeed."

This is what our competition is driving toward – not just in Portland, but in Louisville and Philadelphia and around the globe.

To make Dayton a truly great city we, too, must commit to making our schools great.

The fate of Dayton -- the fate of our region -- and the fate of our schools are clearly bound together.

Over the years, the City of Dayton has been called the Gem City -- the City of Bridges -- the City of Neighbors -- the Birthplace of Powered Flight -- the City of Invention and Innovation -- and Ohio's Aerospace Hub.

It's time we added to that list.

We have to become a city that invests in its children -- a city that recognizes that nothing will be right -- nothing truly great and lasting can be accomplished -- if our children aren't getting the education they need and deserve.

Dayton must be known as the City of Learners -- a community where all children have the chance to succeed -- a community where all of our children are prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow.

In the next few weeks, I will be laying out ways that the people of Dayton can support this cause, and I will be asking all of you to join this effort.

Together we can build this City of Learners.

Together we can do the important work needed to make all of our schools great schools.

Together we can prepare our children to change our world.

As a City of Learners, we will build together a stronger, better Dayton.

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